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TRAMPERS

ON THE TRAIL

BY
HAMLIN GARLAND.

THERE were men on foot who dared the trail. They were not tramps, but trampers. A tramp would not undertake such desperate business as this. It is a thousand miles (as the trail doubles and twists) from Ashcroft to Glenora, with only one "eating station" after leaving Quesnelle. Therefore the man who is willing to start on foot with only thirty pounds of grub on his back, a blanket and a hand-ax, either is of exceptional hardihood or—"has wheels."

I wish to express a certain respect, therefore, by calling these men trampers rather than tramps. The stage road swarmed with them, but that was mere commonplace. Hotels abounded and food could be begged or bought at almost any ranch, but when, on the trail ninety miles from any wagon roads, hotels, farmhouses or other sort of feeding station, I overtook two men on foot, I was impressed. They had just taken off their boots and trousers to wade a rushing little creek, and I remembered with sudden start the number of streams I had crossed on horseback that day which these men had been obliged to wade. The day was frostily cold also, and the water merely melted snow.

I figured, then, the days these men must be on the road before they could purchase supplies. About sixty miles farther on, a store was said to be open, but beyond that it was all of two hundred miles before Hazelton could be reached. Each man had a pack weighing about thirty pounds.



Drawn by
H. Pruett
Share.

Of this, ax, dishes, clothing and blankets could be set down for fifteen pounds, leaving about fifteen pounds of "grub" for each man. Yet here they were pushing on into the wild country with only one chance of getting food.

The mosquitoes were beginning to be very savage, and one or two heavy rains had made the trail soft, but the trampers were in fair condition. They asked me how far it was to Fort Fraser. I told them, and added, "I believe there is a store there where you can buy some supplies." It did not occur to me then that these idiots had dared the road also without money. This, however, I found to be the case, for while I halted my pack-train

[During the summer of 1898, Mr. Garland, in company with one man, an old classmate, led a pack-train from the Thompson river, B. C., to the Stikkeen river, B. C., a distance of nearly one thousand miles as the trail ran. This was called "the overland trail" to the Yukon, and for five months was filled with toiling prospectors, mainly on horseback, but the trail was attempted by men on foot; it is with these characters that this article has to do.]

on account of rain, the trampers pushed on, and when I arrived at the fort the trader told me of their visit.

"They were hungry," he said, "and had no money, and I helped them to some grub. They ought not to be helped. Such crazy men are a nuisance to any country. But there are worse fools than these on this trail. One man left Quesnelle in April without even a blanket or an extra shirt. It seems as if Providence helps such critters. That fellow inside of two days found a couple of blankets that some other man had lost—fact!—and then he picked up an ax and some shirts. Now, that sounds like a fairy story, but it's true. All the same, he would have died if the Siwash had fed him. He came on here half starved and looking like a crazy man, but after we fed him he pushed on. Nothing could stop the cussed lunatic."

When I overtook the two men again, they were staggering down the Bulkley valley. They were thin, their legs making sharp creases in their trouser legs—I could see that as I neared them. They were walking desperately, reeling from side to side with weakness. There was no more smiling on their faces. One man, the smaller, had the countenance of a wolf, pinched in round the nose. His bony jaw thrust forward resolutely. The taller man was limping painfully because of a shoe which had gone to one side. Their packs were light, but their almost incessant change of position gave evidence of pain and great weariness.

I drew near to ask how they were getting along. The tall man, with a look of wistful sadness, like that of a hungry dog, said, "Not very well."

"How are you off for grub?"

"Nothing left but some beans and a mere handful of flour."

I invited them to a "square meal" a few miles farther on, and in order to help them forward I took one of their packs on my horse. I inferred that they would take turns at the other, but when we camped at noon the small man came into view first. He had not once relieved his fellow-traveler, who was lame in addition to his other troubles. This angered me, and I was minded to cast the little sneak out of camp, but his pinched and hungry face helped

me to put up with him. I gave him a smart lecture and said, "I supposed you intended to help the other man, or I wouldn't have relieved you of a pound."

The other man turned up soon, limping, and staggering with weakness. When dinner was ready, they came to the call like a couple of starving dogs. The small man had no politeness left. He gorged himself like a wolf. He fairly snapped the food down his throat. The tall man, by great effort, contrived to display some knowledge of better manners. As they ate, I studied them. They were blotched by mosquito bites, and tanned to a leather brown. Their thin hands were like claws, their doubled knees seemed about to pierce their trouser legs.

"Yes," said the taller man, "the mosquitoes nearly eat us up. We can only sleep in the middle of the day or from about two o'clock in the morning till sunrise. We walk late in the evening—till nine or ten—and then sit in the smoke till it gets cold enough to drive away the mosquitoes. Then we try to sleep. But the trouble is, when it is cold enough to keep them off it's too cold for us to sleep."

"What did you do during the late rains?" I inquired.

"Oh, we kept moving most of the time. At night we camped under a fir tree by the trail and dried off. The mosquitoes didn't bother us so much then. We were wet nearly all the time."

I tried to get at his point of view, his justification for such senseless action, but could only discover a sort of blind belief that something would help him pull through. He had gone to the Cariboo mines to find work, and failing, had pushed on toward Hazelton with a dim hope of working his way to Teslin lake, and to the Klondike. He started with forty pounds of provisions, and three or four dollars in his pocket. I learned he was now dead broke, and his provisions were gone.

Meanwhile, the smaller man made no sign of hearing a word. He ate and ate, till my friend Babcock looked at me with a comical wink. We fed him staples—beans, graham bread and coffee—and he slowly but surely reached the bottom of every dish. He did not fill up, he



Drawn by H. P. Nett Sharpe.

"AS THEY ATE, I STUDIED THEM."

merely "wiped out" the cooked food. The tall man was not far behind him.

As he talked, I could see the life they had led. At first the trail was good. They made twenty miles each day. The weather was dry and warm, and sleeping was not impossible. They camped close beside the trail when they grew tired—I had seen and recognized their camping-places all along. But the rains came on, and they were forced to walk all day through the wet shrubs with the water dripping from their ragged garments. They camped at night beneath the firs (for the ground is always dry under a fir), where a fire is easily built. There they hung over the flame, drying their clothing and their rapidly weakening shoes. The mosquitoes in the shelter and warmth of the trees swarmed upon them bloodily, for they had no netting or tent. Their meals were composed of tea, a few hastily stewed beans and a poor quality of sticky camp bread. Their sleep was broken and fitful. They were either too hot or too cold, and the mosquitoes gave way only when the frost made the trampers' bones ache. In the morning, they awoke to the necessity of putting on their wet shoes and taking the muddy trail, to travel as long as they could stagger forward.

In addition to all this, they had no maps, and knew nothing of their whereabouts or how far it was to a human habitation. Their only comfort lay in the passing of outfits like mine. From such as I, they "rustled food" and clothing. The small man did not even thank us for the meal; he sat himself down for a smoke and communed with his stomach. The tall man was plainly worsted. His voice had a plaintive droop. His shoe gnawed into his foot, and his pack was visibly heavier than that of his companion.

We were two weeks behind our schedule and our own flour-sack was not much bigger than a sachet-bag, but we gave them all our rice and part of our beans and oatmeal, and they moved away. A couple of mornings later, hearing the sound of an ax, I looked out and saw in the early morning light the smaller of the two trampers building a fire beside the trail near an old Indian cabin. We had passed him on the trail somewhere. I

went back to bed and did not see him again. Later in the day the tall man overtook us, for we were delayed by losing a horse. We fed him once more, and gave him all that, considering the losing of our horse made life uncertain, we dared to part with. I comforted him by assuring him that Hazelton was not more than two days' walk away. He went on, leaving us still searching for our horse.

Afterward I saw him in Hazelton. The Indians had fed him again and again, and finally taken him in and nursed him when he staggered into the village of Hagell-gate. He was still limping a little, but looked well otherwise. He asked me how far I thought it was from Hazelton to Glenora, and reading in his eye the insane determination to try that trail, I said:

"You stay right here till you get a chance to reach the coast. No one knows anything about the trail from here on. The trail you've been over is a turnpike compared with the one before you. You might just as well jump into the Skeena and try to swim to the ocean, as start for Glenora on foot without money or provisions."

He was aggrieved. He asked: "What am I to do? There's no work for me here and no way of getting to the coast."

I was irritated. "You should have thought of that at Quesnelle. Certainly you can't expect a man on this hard trail to carry you through. It is going to be a fight for men with good horses to get through. You are making a living here and you'd better stay right where you are. When the next boat comes up, go to the captain and tell him your situation, and he'll help you down the river."

Nevertheless, I knew that all I had said was of no avail. I never saw him again, but I've no doubt he tried the trail. The whole movement was a craze, and he was merely an extreme development of it.

Another similarly minded adventurer was picked up starving, high in the cold green mountains, by an outfit ahead of me. The man was fed and carried along, on condition that he help about the pack-train. As his stomach swelled out he grew loath to do any disagreeable task. He grumbled at being sent out into the wet bush to rustle the horses; he com-

plained of delays and spoke often of the greater speed he could make if unencumbered. All this the good Samaritan with the outfit bore with singular patience. "If you eat with me, you work," was his only comment.

When the tramp (he *was* a tramp) came to the crossing of the Third South fork of the Stikeen, he examined a number of Indian canoes cached there and at once grew insolent. When asked to bring the horses in, he replied: "Oh, go to hell. I've got done with you."

The owner of the outfit said quietly, "You get out o' here *quick*, or I'll kick you into a loose bundle."

The tramp moved his small pack to one of the best canoes, and as he was about to push away, the half-breed guide of the outfit asked, "You know where you go?"

"I'm goin' to Glenora a-whoopin'."

"You goin' to hell. Big cañon seventy miles long below here. No white man, no Siwash, ever go through."

The tramp swore disdainfully. "Aw, go hang yourself, you blank-blank blank! I know my business."

He pushed off. As the smooth, swift water settled round the light canoe, the idiot raised his ragged hat in exultation. "Good-by, you blank-blank fools. This is the way to do it."

He was never seen again. He entered the cañon of the Stikeen a few miles below, and not even a fragment of the canoe was ever observed by Siwash fishermen.

At this same crossing, a few weeks later, as we were about to go to bed, we heard a voice say: "Good-evening, gentlemen. Can I camp by your fire?" We turned to see a small man with a pack on his back emerge from the deep shadow. He walked to the fire and laid down his pack. He was thin, but cheery and lively



"HE HELD UP THE OTHER TROUSER LEG."

Drawn by H. Pruett Shaw.



Drawn by
H. Pratt Shaw.

"THE RAINS CAME ON."

as a cricket. As he warmed up on coffee and beans, he told a dramatic tale. He had been trying to kill squirrels all that day, for he had eaten his last crumb.

He was hairy and ragged, but neat, and his face showed a certain delicacy of physique. He, too, was a marked example of the craze to "get somewhere where gold is." He broke off suddenly in the midst of his story to exclaim with great energy: "I want to do two things, go back and get my boy away from my wife, and break the back of my brother-in-law. He made all the trouble."

Once and again he said, "I'm going to find the gold up here or lay my bones on the hills."

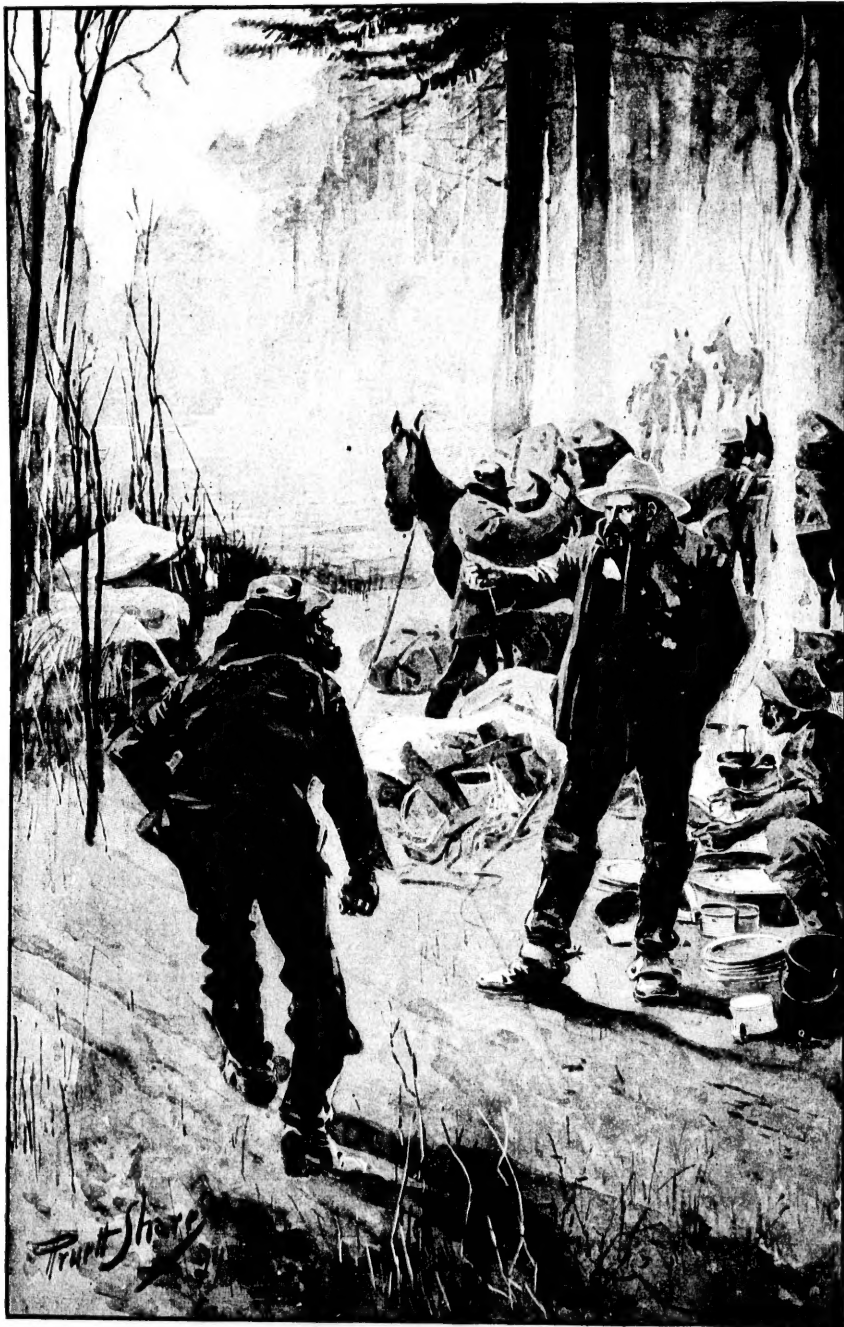
In the midst of these intense phrases he whistled gaily or broke off to attend to his cooking. He told of his hard experiences with pride and joy, and said, "Isn't it lucky I caught you just here?"

In the morning I went over to the camp-fire to see if he were still with us. He was sitting in his scanty bed before the fire, mending his trousers. "I've just got to put a patch on here right now or my knee'll be through," he explained. He had a neat little kit of materials and everything was in order. "I haven't time to turn

the edges of the patch under," he went on. "It ought to be done—you can't make a durable patch unless you do. This housewife, my wife made me when we was first married. I was peddlin' then in eastern Oregon. If it hadn't been for her brother—oh, I'll mash his face in, some day"—he held up the other trouser leg: "See that patch? Ain't that a daisy?—that's the way I ought to do. Say, looks like I ought to rustle enough grub out of all these outfits to last me into Glenora, don't it?"

We came down gracefully—we could not withstand such prattle. The blacksmith turned in some beans, the boys from Manchester divided their scanty store of flour and bacon, I brought some salt, some sugar and some oatmeal, and as the small man put it away he chirped and chuckled like a cricket. His thanks were mere words, his voice was calm. He accepted our aid as a matter of course. No perfectly reasonable man would ever take such frightful chances as this absurd little man set his face to without fear. He hummed a little tune as he packed his outfit into his shoulder-straps. "I ought to rattle into Glenora on this grub, hadn't I?" he said.

At last he was ready to be ferried across



Drawn by H. Penett Share.

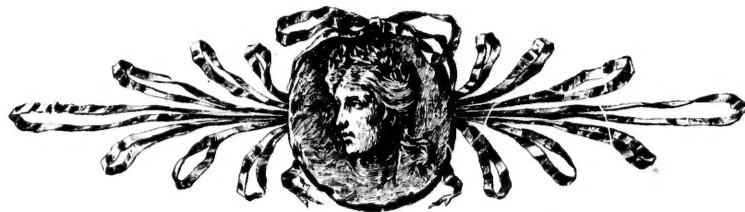
"HE AT ONCE GREW INSOLENT."

the river, which was swift and dangerous. Babcock set him across, and as he was about to depart I gave him a letter to post and a half-dollar to pay postage. My name was written on the corner of the envelope. He knew me then and said, "I've a good mind to stay right with you; I'm something of a writer myself."

I hastened to say that he could reach Glenora two or three days in advance of us, for the reason that we were bothered with a lame horse. In reality, we were getting very short of provisions and were even then on rations. "I think you'll overtake the Borland outfit," I said. "If you don't, and you need help, camp by the road till we come up and we'll all share as long as there's anything to share. But you are in good trim and have as much

grub as we have, so you'd better spin along."

He "hit the trail" with a hearty joy that promised well, and I never saw him again. When we crawled down to the Stikeen without flour enough to blind a cat, we heard that "the Cricket" was cooking on a Hudson bay boat. His trials were over for the time. He was the only man, so far as I knew, who made the whole distance from Quesnelle to Glenora on foot and alone. His cheery smile and unshrinking cheek carried him through a journey that appalled old packers with tents, plenty of grub and good horses. To me he was simply a strongly accentuated type of the gold-seeker—insanely persistent, blind to all danger, deaf to all warning and doomed to failure at the start.



COLUMBIA'S MOTTO.

BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

FROM Liberty's uplifted hand
New light seems shed upon our land—
New light whose penetrating rays
Reach distant shores and future days.

The lofty purpose which unfurled
Old Glory's colors to the world,
Has led that banner's conquering host
To lands that need its message most.

Not freedom only, but the birth
Of better precepts for the earth
That message means: for all men see
How generous may victors be.

Time into triumph turns defeat,
Where progress follows victory's feet.
Across Columbia's sword is writ:
"We conquer but to benefit."